

VLR-12/16/80 NRHP-6/25/85

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received JUN 11 1982  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Bethlehem Church (preferred) (VHLC File No. 82-03)

and/or common Bethlehem United Church of Christ

**2. Location**

street & number Virginia 798 N/A not for publication

city, town Broadway N/A vicinity of congressional district

state Virginia code 51 county Rockingham code 165

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Bethlehem United Church of Christ, c/o Mr. Michael Simmons, Pastor

street & number Route 3

city, town Broadway N/A vicinity of state Virginia 22815

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Rockingham County Courthouse (burnt file)

street & number Court Square

city, town Harrisonburg state Virginia

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

(2) (See Continuation Sheet #1)

(1) Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory title has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1958  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington state D. C.

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Bethlehem Church sits on the west side of the old Valley Turnpike in Tenth Legion west of Smith Creek. Jeremiah Clemens, a local stonemason, built the structure in 1845 to replace an early- to mid-18th-century meetinghouse that was crumbling with age.

### Detailed Architectural Analysis

The church is a small, one-story, gable-roofed structure measuring 42'6" x 32'6". This popular church form was constructed in coursed and squared limestone and reflects the rich local masonry traditions of the central Shenandoah Valley. Each of the two bays in the east gable end contains a four-paneled door on the ground-floor level and smaller 6/6 sash in the gable level. Twentieth-century, stained-glass windows have replaced the original sash in the three-bay side walls and two-bay west gable. The original vaulted ceiling and gable roof were destroyed during the Civil War. The present gable roof, built in 1914, is slightly taller than the original roof and is finished by a frame cornice molding. Brick stove flues break the metal roof at the middle of each of the longer sides. A stone panel, inscribed "Bethlehem Church," provides the only facade decoration in this plain design.

The interior has always been one large room. A few board partitions have been added in the chancel area at the west gable end in the 20th century. Early 20th-century church records indicate that the original plan included a rear gallery, a feature occasionally found in these rural churches, but it was destroyed in the Civil War and was not rebuilt. A 1926 sketch of the church shows sixteen rows of pews facing the chancel. The pulpit, table, and chairs, which formed the focus of this area, have been moved to the new church building. Five rows of benches, called the "Amen Corner," faced the pulpit in the north corner, while several rows of chairs and an organ were located in the opposite corner. The congregation has also saved two kerosene chandeliers.

The front steps have recently been rebuilt to resemble those illustrated in an early 20th-century photograph.

The congregation built a larger, neo-Gothic church in 1951. After several debates over the future of the old church a few years ago, the congregation decided to preserve it and hopes to restore the building to use for church functions.

AMcC

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The Bethlehem Church property for nomination consists of one-half acre (approximately) of land, although the original churchyard was much larger. A new church and auxiliary building have been built in the churchyard between the cemetery and the church. The one-half acre property contains the old church and is bounded by Route 798 to the north and the new Bethlehem Church to the south.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1844-45 Builder/Architect Jeremiah Clemens

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Bethlehem Church was built in 1844-45 by local stonemason Jeremiah Clemens and is the oldest stone church in Rockingham County. The second church of a congregation with roots in the early settlement period of Shenandoah Valley history, the present building replaced a Quaker meetinghouse known to have been standing in 1738. With its rectangular gabled form and lack of ornamentation, the church reflects the conservative character of country churches in the Valley in the mid-19th century, offering a particularly good example of the most common church plan, form, and construction methods found in rural Virginia in its period. Also significant is the building's limestone construction, indicating the persistence of a strong, local masonry tradition in the Linville and Smith Creek areas. Found in abundance in the region, limestone was the preferred building material of German and Scotch-Irish settlers in the Valley in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Later examples of its use in the area were unusual.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Local history, coupled with scant existing records, places the beginning of the Bethlehem Christian Church in the colonial period with a Friends meeting at Smith Creek. In 1738 Robert Scarborough wrote that he was "settled on 600 acres of good meadow about a mile from a Quaker meetinghouse..."<sup>1</sup> His land has been identified on Smith Creek about four and one-half miles southeast of New Market. Pioneer journals refer to attendance at a Smith Creek Friends meeting, as do the earliest surviving records of the Hopewell Friends Meeting of Frederick County.<sup>2</sup>

The growth of the Valley's Quaker population to a number exceeding one thousand by 1782 suggested the propriety of dividing the Hopewell meeting so that Quaker families to the southwest might have their own monthly assembly. In that year the Crooked Run Preparative Meeting was given monthly meeting status, and Smith Creek, along with several other congregations, was added to it. The experiment in greater autonomy was short-lived, however. Westward migration took its toll, so depleting the Crooked Run monthly meeting that it was discontinued in 1807. The remaining families rejoined the remnant of the Hopewell monthly meeting, while they continued to gather weekly in their own meetinghouses such as the one at Smith Creek.

Among the most prominent early members of the Quaker community at Smith Creek was Sebastian Martz, progenitor of this family in Rockingham, who emigrated from Pennsylvania to Smith Creek before the outbreak of the American Revolution. Martz bought property on Smith Creek in March 1777 at "the place where Valentine Sevier had formerly lived."<sup>3</sup> Sevier, an early tavern proprietor of Tenth Legion, had patented the land in 1746. The sons and descendants of Sebastian Martz intermarried with established Quaker families in the Valley and remained active members of the Smith Creek meeting.

By 1844 the 18th-century meetinghouse at Smith Creek was "crumbling with age," and Jacob Martz, Sebastian's son, deeded part of the tract purchased by his father from Sevier to four trustees, who were appointed to superintend the building of a new house for Divine Service at the intersection of the Cross Road and Valley Turnpike.<sup>4</sup> The trustees--John Cowan, Jacob Cowan, Martin Martz, and Jackson Martz--ordered work to begin immediately.

(see continuation sheet #1)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Harrison, J. Huston. Settlers By the Long Grey Trail, Pioneers of August County. Baltimore, 1952.

Hess, Nancy B. The Heartland, Rockingham County, Harrisonburg, Va., 1976.

Kostyu, Frank A. "A History of the United Church." United Church of Christ History and Program. United Church Press, 1974. (see Continuation Sheet #2)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1 1/2 acre

Quadrangle name Tenth Legion, VA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 

1	7	6	9	7	5	2	0	4	2	7	2	1	3	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

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D 

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H 

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**Verbal boundary description and justification** Beginning at a point on SW side of Route 798, about 75' NW of intersection with U.S. 11; thence extending about 75' SW; thence extending about 200' NW; thence extending about 75' NE to SW side of Route 798; thence extending about 200' SE to point of origin. These bounds encompass the old church and do not include the new church directly south of the nominated structure. (See #7 for boundary justification)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state n/a code county n/a code

state n/a code county n/a code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Division Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Division date December 1980 ; Resubmitted 4/25/85

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3144

city or town Richmond state Virginia 23219

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

H. Bryan Mitchell,

Director

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Division

date Resubmitted 4/25/85

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Bethlehem Church, Rockingham County, Virginia

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 6,8

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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey  
1968, 1969, 1979, 1980 State  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
221 Governor Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

8. SIGNIFICANCE

Local tradition maintains that the building was constructed by Jeremiah Clemens, who is listed in the 1850 census as a twenty-nine-year-old stonemason and resident of Rockingham County. Evidence sufficient to establish the 1844-1845 construction date for the church is found in the county land tax book of 1845, which records a building value of \$400, tax exempt, on a tract of three rods, thirty-four poles, owned by the Trustees of "Bethel Church." The church is named for a group of Moravian Brethren missionaries from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, who traveled through this part of the Valley in 1753.<sup>5</sup>

The stone church suffered shell fire during the Civil War and was used as a hospital. Damage to the roof and shattered windows and doors forced the congregation to hold services across the road. Inscriptions of Confederate soldiers still remain in the attic, some of which read as follows: "John H. Chrisman stayed all night in this house. All night being confined by an arbitrary power for opinion sake. March 24, 1862...J. S. Maupin C.S.A. 82 Va. Regiment...1864 Ewell Division..."<sup>6</sup>

The task of reconstructing the building after the war brought the Bethlehem community into fellowship with members of the Christian Church, a distinctly American denomination that developed in the 19th century from a union of Congregationalists with other denominations, especially Evangelical Protestant churches composed of Germans and Swiss.<sup>7</sup> In 1881 the old Smith Creek meeting was reconstituted as the New Bethlehem Christian Congregation, and the new trustees, two of whom were among the original trustees of 1844, signed a covenant with the Valley of Virginia Christian Conference. The Conference cooperated in the restoration of the church before holding its annual meeting there in 1882. The church at once became one of the leading congregations in the Conference, and its membership increased rapidly.

In 1952 the congregation erected a larger, neo-Gothic church adjacent to the old stone building. With the establishment of the United Church of Christ in Philadelphia in 1961, the congregation became known as the Bethlehem United Church of Christ. Church leaders recently agreed to restore the old church for religious purposes.

VDS/AMcC/RAC

<sup>1</sup>John Wayland, A History of Rockingham County (Dayton, Va.: Ruebush-Elkins Co., 1912), p. 246.

<sup>2</sup>A fire destroyed the earliest records of the Hopewell Friends Meeting ca. 1759.

<sup>3</sup>J. Houston Harrison, Settlers By the Long Grey Trail, Pioneers of Old Augusta County (Baltimore, 1975), p. 146.

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

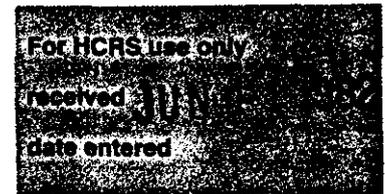
**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Bethlehem Church, Rockingham County, Virginia

Continuation sheet #2

Item number 8,9

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

<sup>4</sup>Myrtle Martz Conquest, "A Brief History of Bethlehem Christian Church," Broadway, Va., 1952, p. 1, Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Archives; Rockingham County Deed Book 17, 21 Sept. 1844, p. 381.

<sup>5</sup>Nancy B. Hess, The Heartland, Rockingham County (Harrisonburg, 1976), p. 35-36.

<sup>6</sup>Martha B. Caldwell, "Bethlehem United Church of Christ," Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Archives, 1977, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Frank A. Kostyu, "A History of the United Church," United Church History and Program (United Church Press, 1974), p. 14.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

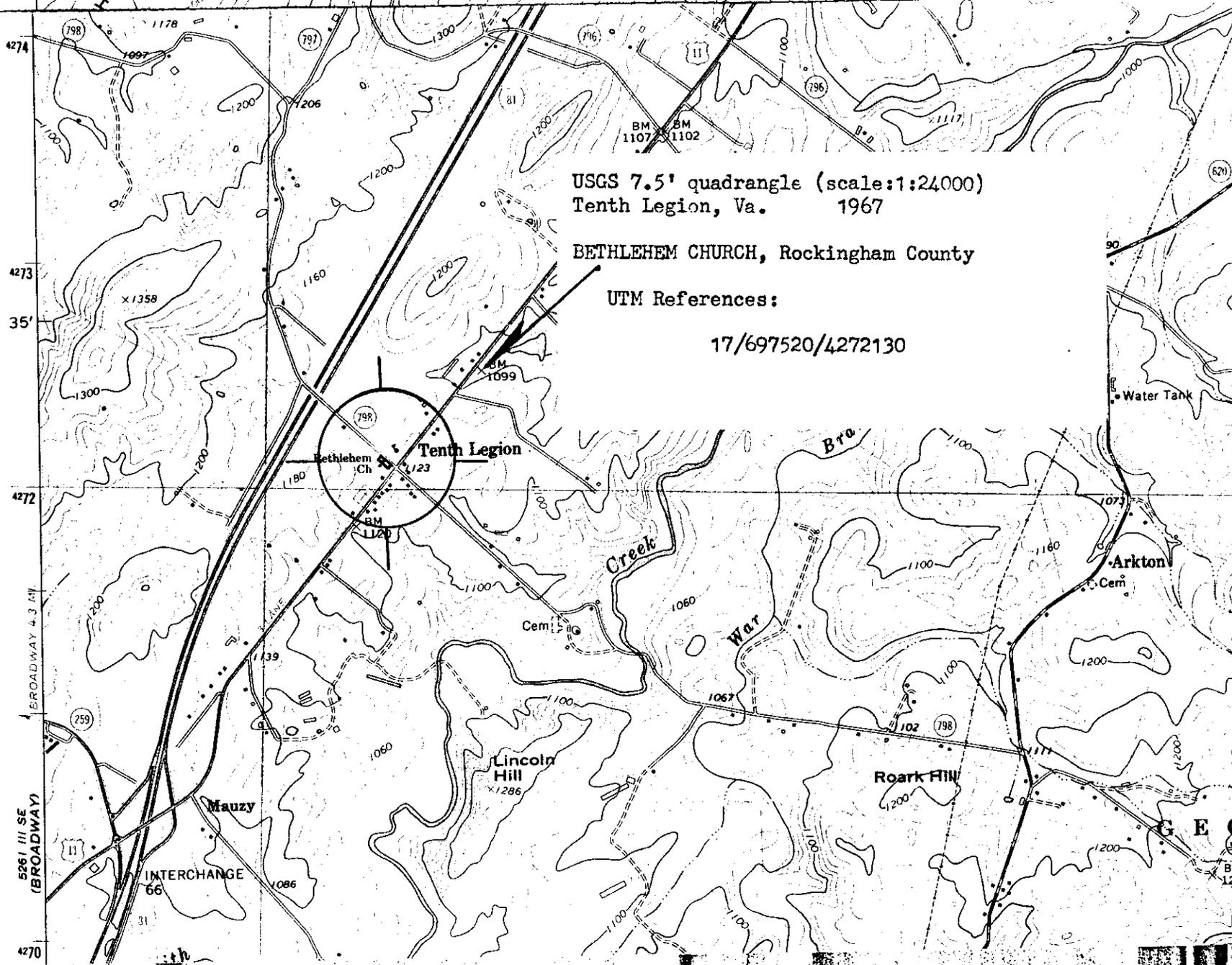
Richmond, Virginia. Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Archives. Rockingham County File No. 82-3, Bethlehem Church. Myrtle Martz Conquest, "A Brief History of Bethlehem Christian Church." Broadway, Va., 1952; Martha B. Caldwell, "Bethlehem United Church of Christ," Harrisonburg, Va., 1977.

Rockingham County Deed Book 17.

Land Books 1782-1850.

Patent Book 25.

Wayland, John. A History of Rockingham County. Dayton, Va.: Ruebush-Elkins Co., 1912.



USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale:1:24,000)  
Tenth Legion, Va. 1967

BETHLEHEM CHURCH, Rockingham County

UTM References:

17/697520/4272130

4274  
4273  
35'  
4272  
4270

BROADWAY 4.3 MI  
5261 III SE  
(BROADWAY)

620

Water Tank

Arkton

GE  
12